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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004918

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: ANBAR ELECTIONS PLANNING PROCEEDS SLOWLY BUT SURELY

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) The IECI, MNF-I, and MoD met December 4 at IECI Baghdad headquarters to define the operational plan for holding elections in Anbar province; details continue to be worked. The MoD rejected an IECI plan to use tribes to provide security in western Anbar. A Special Police Commando Brigade has been introduced into Ramadi to provide Iraqi security support to polling centers in the city. (MNF-I Comment: The Special Police Commando Brigade has been introduced mainly to support counterinsurgency operations. The earliest they could get there was coincident with the election. They will help with election, but the election was not the reason for the brigade's deployment. End Comment.) The non-secure environment has challenged efforts to implement a more ambitious plan designed to encourage and facilitate greater Sunni voter turnout. In comparison to the operations plan for the October referendum, the likely outcome for December 15 in Anbar will be a limited increase in polling sites (and some shifts in location to respond to local preferences), and a modest increase in the number of local polling employees. The IECI will also implement an informal policy to permit Anbar residents to vote at any polling center rather than insist voters must cast their ballots at sites where their names are registered. This policy, which was also applied during the referendum, is designed to respond to Sunni concerns and ensure that those persons displaced by fighting, or fearful of visiting certain locations, have an opportunity to vote.

12. (C) General Hikmat of the IAF also joined the December 4 meeting. The IECI's Chief Operations Officer, Dr. Ali Abdul-Jabbar, who has been consulting with Anbaris on security arrangements, told General Hikmat that the principal problem is the mistrust by Anbar residents of ISF. Yet on December 3 the Minister of Defense met with the IECI and rejected the commission's proposal for tribes to provide security for polling sites west of Ramadi, an arrangement similar to the model used successfully in Falluja during the referendum. Defense Minister al-Dulaimi reportedly insisted that the Iraqi Army be responsible for security. Unable to get permissions for tribal security, the IECI sought MNF-I support to expand the number of sites in the West. MNF-I is currently reviewing the feasibility of adding more locations in the West, but MNF-I resources alone are insufficient to meet the IECI goal. Because MNF-I must transport poll workers out West, the IECI will use staff from Baghdad in this area, rather than from Anbar (hiring, training, and vetting staff from Anbar was deemed not feasible). (MNF-I Comment: We will be supporting about 8 new sites in addition to the 31 previously agreed to. The blame should not be placed on MoD but on poor IECI planning for Al Anbar. Presence of the ISF in the referendum was not why the people did not vote. They didn't vote because the Imams told them not to and because of intimidation. End Comment.)

13. (C) With regard to the city of Ramadi, the IECI proposed a larger number of sites than those locations already committed to by MNF-I that the military is currently reviewing. This proposal, which would require Quick Response Force (QRF) support and the transport of election materials to the additional sites, would increase MNF-I exposure. The MoI has also sent the Wolf Brigade to Ramadi to fill in gaps in local police and supplement Iraqi security on December 15. In a step designed to alleviate tension between Anbaris and the ISF, the IECI has arranged for unarmed tribal leaders be present at polling sites in Fallujah and Ramadi. The IECI is also working with local leaders to arrange for local staff to manage the polls in the two cities. (MNF-I Comment: The Wolf Brigade is also in Al-Anbar for other reasons and arrived in time to support the election. MNF-I has always planned to transport materials and workers -- and is awaiting the IECI's word on where this should be done. End Comment.)

14. (C) Comment: IECI International Commissioner Craig Jenness has advised all sides that some increase in security risk is tolerable if the effort results in facilitating Sunni participation. However, the difficulties of operating in Anbar (e.g., no cell phones and limited vehicular movement), the organizational immaturity of the IECI, the late introduction of MoD views, and the forced reliance on MoI imports have undercut efforts to implement a bold plan. It is unfortunate that the MoD could not accept the result of the IECI's lengthy effort to negotiate with Anbari tribes a

satisfactory security arrangement for western Anbar. But the tardy submission of the IECI plan to the MoD left little room for maneuver. If the Commission had approached the Ministry in October, better planning might have been possible. At this point, it is hard to predict voter turn-out in Ramadi and western Anbar. The good news is the strong interest in participation, but ongoing security problems and corresponding responses necessitate realistic expectations for December 15. Jenness told poloff he greatly appreciated the flexibility, commitment, and patience of the Marines in supporting the electoral process in Anbar. End Comment.
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